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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5140
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1179
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 3278
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2509
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 000574

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SUBJECT: CARTER CENTER'S ELECTION OBSERVERS DEPLOYED

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) The Carter Center's Advisor on Nepal, Peter Burleigh, told the Ambassador March 13 that 12 of 13 planned Carter Center long-term election observers had been deployed across Nepal's five development regions. Burleigh and Carter Center Kathmandu representatives described the potent Madhesi anger they had witnessed in Biratnagar, in Nepal's southern Terai. They said voter registration and citizenship certification efforts had run into roadblocks. The Ambassador and Burleigh discussed the implications of a potential election delay from June until fall 2007. They agreed on the desirability of an eight-party announcement if elections were delayed to avoid finger-pointing, the challenge of keeping Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA) combatants in cantonment for an extended period, and the fragility of the Prime Minister's health. Burleigh noted that the Carter Center planned to meet with Maoist leadership; the Ambassador asked him to convey grave U.S. concern over Maoist leader Prachanda's allegations of a royalist plot to kill U.S. officials.

Status on Long-Term Observers

2. (C) Peter Burleigh, the Carter Center's Advisor on Nepal, and representatives from the Carter Center's Kathmandu office told the Ambassador March 13 that 12 of 13 of the Carter Center's long-term observers were in place across Nepal's five regions. The observers had been deployed in pairs, with one pair per region and two individuals roaming across Nepal. Burleigh said they were currently recruiting the final expatriate observer, who would also have roaming responsibility. Burleigh reported that UN security personnel were assisting in arranging security for the Carter Center's LTOs at their regional posts and that the UN had helped the Carter Center in moving their vehicles to regional sites. The Ambassador stressed the important role the Carter Center should play in ensuring an environment conducive for credible elections.

Situation Tense in Biratnagar

13. (C) Burleigh said that, during his team's recent visit to Biratnagar, the city had been "closed down" by political agitation and they had been unable to travel to neighboring districts because of road blocks. In meetings with Madhesi advocacy groups, Burleigh said Madhesis were stridently anti-Maoist and seemed viscerally angry at the Government of Nepal (GON). Madhesi activists also complained that the international community was operating with a double standard; giving lip service to the need for inclusiveness, while continuing to hire only "pahadis" (or Nepalese from the hills) for national staff positions. There was not a single Madhesi in international offices in Biratnagar, the Madhesi activists complained. Burleigh also noted that in meetings with political party leadership in Biratnagar, none of the parties sent Madhesi representatives. The Ambassador referred to his past trips to Terai districts, during which Madhesi groups expressed similarly vehement sentiments regarding exclusion from Nepal's politics. Burleigh said the Madhesis were looking for status recognition from the GON and that even a symbolic meeting between marginalized group leadership and the Prime Minister would be a well-recieved gesture. The Ambassador reported that Speaker of the House Subash Nemwang, who seemed well-liked and non-partisan, planned to convene a roundtable with all of the marginalized groups to develop a comprehensive way forward.

Voter Registration and Citizenship Certification "Unclear"

14. (C) Burleigh said that the relationship between the voter registration and citizenship certification processes was very unclear. Burleigh was, however, impressed with the mechanics of the ongoing voter registration effort in Biratnagar. He said that the District Election Commissioner's office was

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transcribing handwritten voter lists into a computer-based list that would be sent to Kathmandu. The computer-based system, Burleigh said, allowed the Election Commission to identify duplicates and other irregularities. Burleigh said he had heard many stories in Biratnagar of Indians obtaining Nepalese citizenship illegally and said the dilemma of how to address internally displaced persons was also impeding efficient and effective distribution of citizenship certificates.

Possibility of June Election Wanes

15. (C) Burleigh asked the Ambassador for his prediction on an election date. The Ambassador said that, with legislation pending and logistics hurdles, he did not believe credible elections could be pulled off by June, but added he would not say so publicly. The Ambassador reported that the Indians were keen to keep the peace process rolling and therefore stick to a June date, but they also recognized the growing obstacles to a June election. The Ambassador said the Seven Party Alliance also seemed eager to keep the June date, fearing that a later election, overseen by an interim government that included Maoists, may weaken their position. The Ambassador clarified to Burleigh that an interim government was required to officially announce an election date. The Ambassador said he thought Maoist enthusiasm for June elections was waning, and that the Maoists looked increasingly interested in keeping their options open; ominously, the Maoists were increasingly referring in public to possible mass protests, similar to the April 2006 People's Movement, to ensure a democratic republic. The Ambassador said, however, that the Maoists would have a tough time mobilizing public opinion unless the King made another speech or inflammatory move that could rally public sentiment. The Ambassador agreed with Burleigh that 84-year-old Prime Minister Koirala's health was a continuing concern despite the PM's recovery from recent illnesses.

Consequences of an Election Delay

¶16. (C) When asked by Burleigh what he believed the consequences would be of an election delay, the Ambassador said this would go relatively smoothly if the eight parties jointly announced and attributed an election delay to technical barriers. Without such a joint statement, the Ambassador said, finger-pointing between the parties would be inevitable with detrimental ramifications for the peace process. Burleigh and the Ambassador also discussed the challenge of managing the PLA cantonment sites and keeping combatants in the camps for an extended period of time. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of the potential tripartite UN-GON-Maoist arrangement on camp management to address deteriorating conditions in the camps. Burleigh said that, if a delay occurred, the Carter Center would have to seek additional funds to keep its LTOs in the field. The Ambassador reiterated the importance of the Carter Center's mandate and said he hoped that in the event of a delay, observers could remain in Nepal.

Pokharel the Right Man for the Job

¶17. (C) The Ambassador and Burleigh agreed that Chief Election Commissioner Boj Raj Pokharel was making the best of a tough job. Burleigh said Pokharel had been wise in issuing a public statement warning the GON regarding political decisions and legislation needed to ensure a sound election process. The Ambassador agreed that Pokharel was viewed as a strong, non-partisan advocate for a credible election.

Carter Center Message to Maoists on Alleged Anti-U.S. Plot

¶18. (C) Burleigh mentioned that the Carter Center planned to meet with Maoist leadership. The Ambassador asked Burleigh to convey grave U.S. concern over Maoist leader Prachanda's allegations of a royalist plot to kill U.S. officials. The Ambassador emphasized the irresponsibility and danger of

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Prachanda's statement as it gave armed Maoists on the street the license to kill Americans and blame it on the royalists. The Ambassador said he had asked the government to demand that the Maoists provide evidence to back such a claim and to push Prachanda to publicly tell his cadre to exercise restraint.

Comment

¶19. (C) The Carter Center's deployment of long-term observers is a positive step toward credible elections. We will continue contact with the Carter Center as it begins to receive reporting from the regions. As the only international observers on the ground thus far, they will play a vital role in promoting a transparent and secure atmosphere in the lead-up to elections and will potentially play a role in coordinating international monitoring efforts.

MORIARTY